

Three Reasons to Get the Gardasil Vaccine

1) Gardasil protects against genital warts caused by HPV.

Gardasil has been proven in preventing four forms of HPV (Types 6, 11, 16, and 18). In fact, The FDA recently found that Gardasil is 90% effective in preventing genital warts that appear in both men and women.

What is HPV and how common is it?

The human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States. At least 50% of people who are sexually active will acquire HPV during their lifetime.

In most cases, a person's immune system will clear up HPV within two years. However, some HPV infections can lead to health problems, including genital warts.

What are genital warts?

Genital warts usually appear as a small bump or groups of bumps in the genital area. They can be small or large, raised or flat, or shaped like a cauliflower. Warts can appear within weeks or months after sexual contact with an infected partner—even if the infected partner has no signs of genital warts. If left untreated, genital warts might go away, remain unchanged, or increase in size or number. They will not turn into cancer.

2) Gardasil can help prevent cancer.

If you had the chance to prevent cancer with a simple three-part vaccination, would you? Gardasil was found to be effective in preventing cervical lesions in 98% of its cases. These cervical lesions, if left untreated, can often turn into cervical cancer.

What is cervical cancer and how common is it?

Cervical cancer usually does not have symptoms until it is quite advanced. For this reason, it is important for women to get regular cervical cancer screenings or pap smears. Screening tests can find early signs of disease so that problems can be treated early, before they ever turn into cancer.

In 2009, there were 11,270 new cases of cervical cancer and 4,070 deaths resulting from cervical cancer complications in the United States alone.

What else can I do to decrease my chances of getting cervical cancer?

1. Get regular Pap tests

The Pap test (sometimes called a Pap smear) is a way to examine cells collected from the cervix, located in the uterus. The main purpose of the Pap test is to detect cancer or abnormal cells that may lead to cancer. It can also help find other infections or inflammations.

After age 21, women are recommended to get regular Pap tests to make sure to catch any signs of cervical cancer as early as possible. According to ACOG (American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists), Cervical cancer screening should begin approximately 3 years after the onset of vaginal intercourse or no later than age 21 years

If I get the Gardasil injections, is there still a chance I could get cervical cancer?

Yes. While Gardasil is a highly effective form of preventative care, it does not protect against all forms of HPV that could cause cervical cancer.

2. Follow safe sex practices

The only sure way to prevent HPV is to abstain from all sexual activity such as oral, anal and vaginal sex. For those who are sexually active, condoms definitely help. Condoms may also lower the risk of developing HPV-related diseases (genital warts and cervical cancer). But make sure to still be cautious in your sexual practices because HPV can infect areas that are not covered by a condom—so condoms may not fully protect against HPV.

Knowing your partner or decreasing your number of partners can also help lower your chances of getting HPV. The fewer partners a person has had – the less likely he or she is to have HPV. But even persons with only one lifetime sex partner can get HPV, if their partner has had previous partners. Just ask your partner about any history of HPV.

3) Time is running out.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices have recommended Gardasil for women up until the age of 25. After age 25, Gardasil is not guaranteed to be effective. There is no cure for the HPV virus so preventative care, such as Gardasil, will be effective

What if I already have HPV? Could I still benefit from the Gardasil vaccine?

Yes. Gardasil protects against 4 types of HPV (two low-risk and two high-risk strains) so if you've already contracted HPV, you could still benefit from protecting yourself against the more high-risk strains that Gardasil targets.

Are there any side effects I should know about?

This vaccine has been licensed by the FDA and approved by CDC as safe and effective. It was studied in thousands of females (ages 9 through 25 years) around the world and its safety continues to be monitored by CDC and the FDA. Studies have found no serious side effects. The most common side effect is soreness in the arm around the area where the shot is given. It is also recommended that patients wait in their doctor's office for 15 minutes after getting the vaccine in the case of occasional fainting after the vaccine.

Where can I get the vaccine?

Ask your Foothill College Health Services representative to get the Gardasil vaccine.